SHAKESPEARE AND THE POPULARITY OF POETRY BOOKS IN PRINT, 1583–1622

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Shakespeare's poems had very uneven success in the early modern book trade: *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* became immediate bestsellers, whereas the *Sonnets* received not a single reprint in the 30 years following their original publication in 1609. We argue that an examination of the popularity of poetry books in the book trade is necessary to come to a better understanding of the status of Shakespeare's printed poems in their own time. What were the best-selling poetry books of the period, and how popular were they compared to Shakespeare's narrative poems? How unusual was it for a poetry book to be reprinted 15 times (like *Venus and Adonis*), or not to be reprinted at all? We also contextualize the question of popularity by focusing on genre, placing Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and *Venus and Adonis* amidst the publication history of their generically most closely related poetry books. Our article also has a second, broader ambition, which is to evaluate the popularity of late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century poetry books in relation to the book trade more generally.

When they were first published, Shakespeare's poems had very uneven success in the book trade. *Venus and Adonis*, his first work to reach print, became an immediate bestseller, with 6 editions in the 1590s, 10 during his lifetime, and 16 by 1636.[1] Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, in contrast, received not a single reprint in the 30 years following their original publication in 1609.[2] These figures seem surprising given that Shakespeare's narrative poem has since become one of his lesser known works, whereas the *Sonnets* are now among the most famous poetry in the English language. His other poems were more popular than the *Sonnets* but less than *Venus and Adonis*: his second narrative poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, first published in 1594, received six editions by 1616 and three more by 1655, whereas

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1 The extant editions of *Venus and Adonis* are dated 1593, 1594, 1595?, 1596, 1599, 1599, 1602?, '1602' (in fact 1607/8), '1602' (in fact c. 1608/9), '1602' (in fact c. 1610), 1617, 1620, 1627, 1630, 1630/36?, and 1636. The two earliest editions appeared in quarto and all others in octavo. The best bibliographic introduction to the early editions of Shakespeare's narrative poem remains *The Poems*, A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Philadelphia, 1938), 369–80.

2 John Benson's 1640 edition of Shakespeare's *Poems* reprints all of the sonnets, in rearranged form, except for 18, 19, 43, 56, 75 and 76, and further includes 'A Lover's Complaint' (originally printed as part the 1609 *Sonnets* volume), 'The Phoenix and Turtle' and the poems of the enlarged 1612 edition of *The Passionate Pilgrime* (see Michael Schoenfeldt, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's Poetry* (Cambridge, 2010), 134.

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The Passionate Pilgrime—attributed to Shakespeare on the title page but in fact a miscellany with 20 poems by various hands, with versions of Sonnets 138 and 144 and three poems from *Love's Labour's Lost*—went through three editions from 1599 to 1612.[3] The success of *Venus and Adonis* made of it his bestselling work, its 16 editions by 1660 placing it ahead of *1 Henry IV* with nine editions and *Richard III* with eight. The *Sonnets*, in contrast, are in the small group of Shakespeare books—with *Much Ado about Nothing* (1600), *The Second Part of Henry IV* (1600), and *Troilus and Cressida* (1609)—that failed to receive a second edition inside 25 years.[4] By comparison, no fewer than 20 Shakespeare playbooks and poetry books published in his lifetime were reprinted at least once inside a quarter century.

These figures, which document the popularity of Shakespeare's poetry in the early modern book trade, are not new, but they have never been fully contextualized. We argue that an examination of the popularity of poetry books in the book trade is necessary to come to a better understanding of the status of Shakespeare's printed poems in their own time. The context on which we focus is that of English poetry books first published between 1583 and 1622, a period which includes and frames the years of Shakespeare's career from the early 1590s to about 1612. How popular were poetry books published during this period? What were the best-selling poetry books of the period, and how do they compare to *Venus and Adonis*? How unusual is it for a poetry book to be reprinted 15 times (like *Venus and Adonis*), or not to be reprinted at all within a quarter century of original publication (like the *Sonnets*)? With nine and three editions respectively, how comparatively popular were *The Rape of Lucrece* and *The Passionate Pilgrime*? We also contextualize the question of popularity by focusing on genre: a considerable number of sonnet collections were published in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, so what can we gather about the book-trade performance of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* if we consider them in the context of similar books? As for *Venus and Adonis*, what light is shed on Shakespeare's narrative poem if it is placed amidst the publication history of its generically most closely related poems? These are some of the questions we will try to answer.[5]

3 *The Rape of Lucrece* appeared in quarto in 1594 and in octavo in 1598, 1600, 1600, 1607, 1616, 1624, 1632, and 1655. As for *The Passionate Pilgrime*, the title page of the only extant copy of the earliest edition, in octavo, is lost; the other two editions, also in octavo, are dated 1599 and 1612. For *The Passionate Pilgrime*, see *Complete Sonnets and Poems*, The Oxford Shakespeare, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford, 2002), 74–82, and *Shakespeare's Poems*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Henry Woudhuysen (London, 2007), 82–91. The 67-line poem 'The Phoenix and Turtle' appeared in *Love's Martyr* (1601), attributed to Robert Chester on the title page, a book of some 200 pages of which the Shakespeare poem occupies no more than three. *Love's Martyr* can thus not be considered a Shakespeare poetry book.

4 The *texts* of these three plays were of course reprinted in the First Folio (or, as in the case of *Troilus and Cressida*, a slightly different version of the text), but they received no second edition as quarto playbooks. For the success of Shakespeare's quarto playbooks in the book trade of his time, see Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (Cambridge, 2013).

5 Note, however, that our figures cannot claim to be a good guide to poetic production in the period because they include reprints of poetry written and first published before 1583.

Apart from shedding light on the publication history of Shakespeare's poems, our article has a second, broader ambition, which is to evaluate the popularity of late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century poetry books in relation to the book trade more generally. Important work has been done by Peter Blayney and, jointly, by Alan Farmer and Zachary Lesser on the popularity of playbooks in the same period, and our essay builds on this to extend the analysis to poetry.[6] By applying some of the questions they have asked about playbooks to poetry books, concerning market share, reprint rates and publication patterns, we hope to arrive not only at an insight into the book-trade popularity of poetry but also at an instructive comparison of what early modern publishers and book-buyers made of the two genres of early modern literature which are most studied today: poetry and drama.[7]

Poetry Books in Print, 1583–1622

In order to chart the history of poetry books in print in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, we first need to determine what constitutes a 'poetry book' for the purposes of the present article. There may occasionally be some doubt as to whether a play was written for commercial public performance and should thus be counted among the 'professional plays' on which Blayney and Farmer and Lesser's counts are based.[8] Yet on the whole, it is easy enough to identify playbooks. With poetry books, things are more complicated. The publications of Thomas Churchyard, for instance, are often generically hybrid and contain substantial quantities of poetry and prose. In borderline cases, we have decided about inclusion or exclusion on the basis of relative quantity, a predominance of poetry in a book leading us to classify it as a 'poetry book'. If, on the other hand, a book chiefly

6 See Peter W. M. Blayney, 'The Publication of Playbooks', in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (eds), *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York, 1997), 383–422, and 'The Alleged Popularity of Playbooks', *SQ*, 56 (2005), 33–50; and Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', *SQ*, 56 (2005), 1–32, 'Structures of Popularity in the Early Modern Book Trade', *SQ*, 56 (2005), 206–13, and *Plays, Print, and Popularity in Shakespeare's England* (forthcoming). In 'What Is Print Popularity? A Map of the Elizabethan Book Trade', in Andy Kesson and Emma Smith (eds), *The Elizabethan Top Ten: Defining Print Popularity in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2013), Farmer and Lesser divide 'all speculative entries in the STC into six major categories: Religion; Politics and History; Science and Mathematics; School and Language Instruction; Poesy and the Arts; and Society and Conduct' (forthcoming), and study their respective market share. We are grateful to Farmer and Lesser for sharing their article with us ahead of publication.

7 The print popularity of prose fiction has received some attention, in particular, Lori Humphrey Newcomb, *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England* (New York, 2002), and Steve Mentz, *Romance for Sale in Early Modern England: The Rise of Prose Fiction* (Aldershot, 2006).

8 For 'professional plays', see Farmer and Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 6, in particular note 24. Blayney and Farmer and Lesser generally exclude from their count plays not written for the London professional theatres, such as masques, entertainments, closet drama and university drama (see Blayney, 'The Publication of Playbooks', 384, and Farmer and Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 31).

consists of prose, like Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* or Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*, we do not include it in our count of poetry books, even if it contains noteworthy poems. We take the word 'book' seriously insofar as we do not include single-sheet folios (or 'broadsides') in our count, which means that ballads and epitaphs published in such format are not counted. We focus on poetry in English, published in England and Scotland,[9] so we include the various translations of Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and others but no editions in the original languages.[10] We include religious poetry of various kinds, such as devotional verse, meditations in verse, poetry engaged with the art of moral instruction, as well as verse adaptations of Biblical material, though not the psalms (which are a special category).[11] Nor do we count books of music which include lyrics. Apart from these exceptions, we impose no restrictions on contents (fictional or non-fictional) or subgenre: all books whose content is non-dramatic and chiefly in verse rather than in prose qualify for inclusion.[12]

As we discovered, early modern books of poetry had fluid afterlives. In several cases, often involving the best known poets of the period, the second and following editions of a work differ considerably from the first. Michael Drayton, for example, is well known to have been a compulsive reviser of his work, and although relatively few of his poems were reprinted individually, his popular volumes of collected poetry contain reprints of poems which often depart significantly from their original form. The expansion of *Mortimeriados* (1596) into the first part of *The Barrons Wars* is just one example of Drayton's 'laureate' practices.[13] Other authors, such as William Warner, used the reprinting of their poetry as a way of presenting 'augmented', 'enlarged', or 'corrected' versions. Warner's verse history *Albions England* (1586), for example, started life as a book that was 14 sheets in

9 Although these books do not fit the 'poetry book' criteria outlined here and as a result are not included in our analysis, additional poetry books written in the English language were also printed in mainland Europe. These include: *STC* 25438 (1586) which was printed in Leiden, *STC* 21359 (1601), which was printed in Antwerp, *STC* 11929 (1615), 12066 (1615), 12067 (1615), 11928 (1616), and 11930 (1616), all of which were printed in Dort, *STC* 22963 (1616) and 22964 (1620), which were printed in St Omer, *STC* 20664 (1619), which was printed in Paris, and finally, *STC* 25185a.5 (1619) and 16690 (1620) which were printed in Germany.

10 Note though that we have included books in which an author has provided a facing page translation with an equal proportion of vernacular text (e.g., R. C.'s translation of Torquato Tasso's *Godfrey of Bulloigne* (1594), and William Crashaw's translation of Bernard of Clairvaux's Latin verse dialogue *Querela Sive, Dialogus Animæ et Corporis Damnati* (1613)).

11 Regarding this particular subcategory of poetry books we have had to make decisions based on a process of categorization with which other critics might not agree; this resulted in the inclusion of devotional material that deliberately draws attention to itself as having been shaped by the hand of a poet (from basic metrical paraphrase to works more invested in the demonstration of literary skill). For more on the relationship between poetry and Scripture, see James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (Baltimore, 1981).

12 We also exclude books *about* verse, like Thomas Campion's *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* (1602).

13 See Joseph A. Berthelot, *Michael Drayton* (New York, 1967), 81.

length, but by its fifth reprinting in 1612 it was nearly four times as long. The publications of Edmund Spenser are illustrative of other complexities. As can be inferred from the bibliographic variations found in folio copies of *The Faerie Queene*, later volumes 'were made up by issuing as a single volume a number of separate sections which had been printed independently at periods often several years apart'.[14] We have based our count on the numbers and dates provided by the *STC*, following their distinctions between reissues and reprints as closely as possible.[15]

A further factor that can obscure or exaggerate the popularity of an individual poem is its appearance within a collection with works by other authors. For example, the augmented second and following editions of J. C.'s epyllion *Alcilia Philoparthens Loving Follie* (1595) reprinted *Alcilia* in 1613, 1619, and 1628 together with John Marston's *The Metamorphosis of Pigmalions Image* (1598), Samuel Page's *The Love of Amos and Laura* (of which there is no extant separate edition), and epigrams by John Harington, most of which were later integrated into his 1618 collection, *The Most Elegant and Witty Epigrams of Sir John Harrington*. Samuel Page is otherwise unrepresented in our catalogue because, although he was praised by Francis Meres for being one of the 'most passionate among us to bewaile and bemoane the perplexities of love', little of his work survives.[16]

A very different model of multi-authorship is exemplified by one of the bestselling publications of the period, Thomas Overbury's *A Wife, now a Widow*. First published by Lawrence Lisle in 1614, it initiated something of a publishing phenomenon, as Lisle marketed its increasingly augmented reprints as the production of a single literary circle.[17] In its original form, the book contained a poem of 'forty-seven verses in the *Venus and Adonis* meter, discussing the origins and benefits of marriage', but by the 11th edition in 1622 it had evolved into a miscellany including 'numerous liminary poems, *A Wife*, eighty one "Characters," twenty items of "Newes" and several miscellaneous poems and prose pieces'.[18]

14 Francis R. Johnson, *A Critical Bibliography of the Works of Edmund Spenser* (Baltimore, 1933), 33.

15 See *STC* 23083.7 and 23084 which are a composite of reprinted and reissued material. For the *STC*, see *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475–1640*, compiled by A. W. Pollard, G. R. Redgrave, W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson and Katharine F. Pantzer, 2nd edn, 3 vols (London, 1976–1991).

16 Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia: Wits Treasury* (1598), sig. Oo4r. Our ignorance about loss rates of printed poetry books introduces into publication figures what Farmer and Lesser have called 'an irreducible element of uncertainty' ('The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 30). However, they maintain that the number of lost playbook editions is likely to be too small to affect their overall argument ('The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 29–30). We believe the same applies to poetry books and our argument about them, given that neither the bibliographic makeup nor the social prestige of poetry books predisposed them to higher loss rates than playbooks.

17 See John Considine, 'The Invention of the Literary Circle of Sir Thomas Overbury', in Claude J. Summers and Ted Larry-Pebworth (eds), *Literary Circles and Cultural Communities in Renaissance England* (Columbia, 2000), 59–74, 74.

18 Considine, 'The Invention of the Literary Circle of Sir Thomas Overbury', 59.

After 1622 *A Wife* passed into the hands of other publishers and remained in print well into the seventeenth century. However, in spite of the work's longevity, we disqualify all editions but the first because the poem itself occupies a mere third of the book's contents from the first reprint.

Table 1 lists the number of poetry books, in English, published per year from 1583 to 1622, and Table A1 in the Appendix A identifies the books by publication year and *STC* number. The second column of Table 1 provides the numbers of first editions published in any given year, whereas the third column shows the total number of editions per year, meaning first editions and reprints. Reprints include subsequent editions of poetry books first published before 1583. The overall number of poetry books published in the 40-year period is 1021, with 701 first editions and 320 reprints. These figures correspond to a yearly average of 25.5 poetry books, with 17.5 first editions and 8.0 reprints. Comparatively few poetry books were published early in this period, but after a steep rise from 1583 to the mid-1590s, the numbers remain comparatively stable, with considerable fluctuation from year to year but no substantial increase or decrease over extended periods. This can be illustrated by dividing the 40-year period into four slices of 10 years, the number of poetry books published in the first of these (1583–1592) being substantially lower, namely 125, than that in the subsequent ones, 284 (1593–1602), 277 (1603–1612), and 335 (1613–1622). The first 4 years, from 1583 to 1586, show the lowest yearly totals in the 40-year period, an average of nine poetry books per year. In the next 7 years, 1587–1593, the average yearly number increases by more than 65 per cent (15.0), with yearly totals ranging between 11 and 18. In the remaining 29 years, from 1594 to 1622, no single year sees the publication of fewer than 17 poetry books, and the yearly average rises to 30.3. This trend reflects a growing demand for leisure reading of secular texts in the final decades of the sixteenth century, on which H. S. Bennett commented as long ago as 1965.[19] 1594 emerges as a key year in this evolution, with an unprecedented 22 first editions and 28 editions overall. This seems interesting for two reasons: in 1594, both of Shakespeare's narrative poems are in print, *The Rape of Lucrece* being newly published and *Venus and Adonis* reaching its second edition a year after the first. Moreover, 1594 is an extraordinary year not only for poetry books but also for playbooks, with an unprecedented flood of 18 new plays, probably occasioned by the reopening of the public theatres following prolonged closure owing to the plague.[20] What this suggests is that the evolution in the frequency of the publication of poetry books and playbooks (or, to put this differently, of poetry and dramatic poetry) may not have been entirely unrelated.

From 1583 to 1594, the average number of reprints per year is no more than 3.9, but as the number of poetry books suddenly increased in 1594 and 1595,

19 See H. S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers, 1558–1603* (Cambridge, 1965), 247–8. Farmer and Lesser's figures in 'What Is Print Popularity?' also illustrate 'the transformation that occurred in the last decade of Elizabeth's reign, when the market share of Poesy and the Arts increased dramatically' (forthcoming).

20 See Blayney, 'The Publication of Playbooks', 386.

Table 1. Number of English poetry books published from 1583 to 1622

Year of publication	Number of first editions	Number of first editions and reprints
1583	6	8
1584	4	9
1585	5	10
1586	7	9
1587	12	18
1588	8	13
1589	12	16
1590	7	11
1591	16	18
1592	9	13
Totals, 1583–1592	86	125
1593	13	16
1594	22	28
1595	26	36
1596	25	33
1597	13	21
1598	27	34
1599	18	31
1600	26	39
1601	17	18
1602	18	28
Totals, 1593–1602	205	284
1603	40	47
1604	28	35
1605	22	28
1606	22	29
1607	20	25
1608	7	17
1609	14	22
1610	9	20
1611	12	24
1612	21	30
Totals, 1603–1612	195	277
1613	37	54
1614	27	36
1615	22	35
1616	17	29
1617	12	24
1618	14	19
1619	16	26
1620	22	36
1621	19	36
1622	29	40
Totals, 1613–1622	215	335
Totals, 1583–1622	701	1021

publishers seem to have gained faith in the commercial viability of reprints, and from 1595 to 1602, their average number goes up to 8.8 per year.[21] Reprints also made a considerable contribution to the 54 poetry books of 1613: they account for 17, the highest yearly number in the 40-year period. The greatest number of 'new' poetry books appeared in 1603, with 40 (though with no contribution by Shakespeare), and the reason for this peak is not hard to find: Queen Elizabeth's death and King James's accession. According to our count, no fewer than 23 of the 40 first editions appearing that year are occasional publications devoted to these topics. The year 1613, which comes close to rivalling the 40 first editions of 1603, similarly saw the publication of a spate of occasional poetry books, several of which are related to the death of Prince Henry or to the marriage of James I's eldest daughter Elizabeth to Frederick V. The peaks in the yearly number of poetry books can thus be easily accounted for and do nothing to contradict the point that from 1594 to 1622, the number of poetry books per year reveals no significant long-term trends.[22]

The preceding figures have allowed us to chart the evolution in the supply over the 40-year period, but they say nothing about the market share of poetry books. For this, we need to compare the number of poetry books to the total number of English books published and sold in bookshops. Thanks to Blayney, we have a well informed estimate of what this number is: he examined all the numbers for the relevant years in Philip R. Rider's chronological index in the *STC*, omitting all variants, reissues, duplicate entries, and non-speculative books (i.e., books 'not printed for sale in bookshops').[23] The remaining total gives us an accurate figure of the number of extant titles which constitute what Blayney calls 'the market': 2428 titles from 1583 to 1592; 2532 from 1593 to 1602; 3405 from 1603 to 1612; and 4077 from 1613 to 1622.[24] As these figures suggest, the market expanded considerably (by more than 60 per cent) from the second to the fourth of these 10-year periods. Given that the number of poetry books remained relatively constant during the same 30-year period, the market share decreased, which is what Table 2 shows. The 10-year period from 1593 to 1602 thus not only saw the arrival in print of Shakespeare, with his poetry books going through an astounding 13 editions, but also constitute the time when the market share of poetry was at its

21 The timing of increased investment in reprints coincides with the same trend in playbooks (see Farmer and Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 11).

22 There is a momentary slump in the number of first editions which is harder to explain: in the 4-year period from 1608 to 1611, the number of new playbooks drops to an average of 10.5 per year, whereas the average yearly number in the preceding 14 years had been more than double, with 23.1. Given that the number of reprints in the corresponding years did not decrease but was, if anything, higher than average, we have no other explanation to offer than that new material which publishers considered worth publishing was temporarily in short supply.

23 Blayney, 'The Alleged Popularity of Playbooks', 49. For Rider's index, see *STC*, vol. 3, 325–405.

24 Blayney, 'The Alleged Popularity of Playbooks', 48.

Table 2. Market share of English poetry books, 1583–1622

	Number of poetry books	'The market'	Market share (%)
1583–1592	125	2428	5.15
1593–1602	284	2532	11.22
1603–1612	277	3405	8.14
1613–1622	335	4077	8.22
Total, 1583–1622	1021	12,442	8.21

peak. It more than doubled from the preceding 10-year period and then significantly decreased (by almost thirty per cent) over the next 20 years.

Blayney's figures[25] further allow us to compare the number and market share of poetry books and playbooks. The total number of poetry books, and thus also the market share of poetry books, is almost three times (and the number of first editions of poetry books more than three times) that of playbooks. In every 10-year period, there were at least twice as many new poetry books as there were new playbooks. Significantly, the evolution of the market share of poetry books over the 40-year period runs in parallel to that of playbooks: in the first 10-year slice, the market share is at its lowest and in the second it is at its highest, before decreasing in the third and fourth. We might have expected that a slump in the market share of one genre would be offset by a peak in the other, but this does not seem to have been the case. Rather the demand for poetry books and playbooks appears to have run roughly in parallel.

Given that our 'poetry books' form a generically capacious category, ranging from devotional verse to epyllia, from the epic to epigrams, and from single-authored collected works to miscellanies, whereas Blayney and Farmer and Lesser confine the category of 'playbooks' to that of plays written for performance in front of paying customers, the differences in market share between poetry books and playbooks may not be very surprising. In fact, the market share of poetry books seems to have been closer to that of sermon books than to that of playbooks. Farmer and Lesser calculated that the market share of sermon books from 1606 to 1640 was 9.8 per cent, and Blayney has arrived at a slightly lower figure of 8.9 per cent for the period from 1583 to 1640.[26] If these figures are correct, then the market share of sermon books must have been somewhat lower than 8.9 per cent from 1583 to 1606 given that Farmer and Lesser arrive at a higher percentage by excluding those years than Blayney did by including them.[27] The market share of sermon books from 1583 to 1632 according to

25 See 'The Alleged Popularity of Playbooks', 48.

26 Farmer and Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 21, and Blayney, 'The Alleged Popularity of Playbooks', 43.

27 Farmer and Lesser's up-to-date figures for 1583 to 1606 are 7.7 per cent (478 of 6194 editions) (personal communication).

Farmer and Lesser's most recent statistics is 10.2 per cent (1701 of 16,634 editions), a fraction which is higher, but not much higher, than the market share of poetry books (7.85 per cent) during the same 40-year period.[28] The popularity of printed sermons in the early modern period has long been established.[29] More generally, it is well known that religion is the subject to which the greatest share of early modern books was devoted—considerably more than to what we now call 'literature'[30]—and Ian Green has shown that sermons constituted the second most popular genre of religious titles after treatises.[31] Remarkably, it appears that the market share of poetry books from 1583 to 1622 was not much lower than that of the highly popular sermon books.[32]

The preceding paragraphs shed light on the popularity of poetry books as a generic group by examining how often stationers decided to invest in them and calculating the market share for which they accounted. Yet if we are interested in how well poetry books sold once they were in print, we need to focus not on the total number of editions and market shares but on reprint rates.[33] As Farmer and Lesser show, playbooks were less popular as a generic group than sermon books insofar as fewer editions of playbooks were published and sold than of sermon books; yet, playbook titles were more popular, on average, than sermon book titles insofar as the former have a considerably higher reprint rate than the latter.[34] 'Popularity' in the book trade, as Farmer and Lesser show, is a complex concept of which there are several indicators, including the total number of editions, market share, and reprint rates. The different indicators provide answers to different questions, revealing what they term different 'structures of popularity'.

Blayney and Farmer and Lesser have examined reprint rates for printed plays, and it is instructive to compare their figures to ours for printed poetry (see Table 3). Blayney has counted the number of professional plays first printed

28 We are grateful to Farmer and Lesser for sharing their statistics with us.

29 Bennett commented on their 'great numbers' (*English Books & Readers, 1558 to 1603*, 107), and Farmer and Lesser quote the complaint about the excessive number of sermon-books by the preacher Samuel Ward in 1616, who wrote that 'euen Printers themselues complaine, that the Presse is oppressed with them' ('The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 21).

30 See Kari Konkola, ' "People of the Book": The Production of Theological Texts in Early Modern England', *PBSA*, 94 (2000), 5–31, for a comparison of the number of editions of religious and literary titles, and a documentation of the greater popularity of the former. See also Bennett, *English Books and Readers, 1558–1603*, 112–258.

31 See Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), 194–216.

32 For the popularity of sermon-books, see also James Rigney, 'Sermons into Print', in Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington and Emma Rhatigan (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon* (Oxford, 2011), 198–212.

33 What made reprints highly attractive from a commercial point of view is that the publisher's 'costs would no longer include the price of the manuscript, authority, license, and registration' (Blayney, 'The Publication of Playbooks', 412).

34 See Farmer and Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 18–24. As they point out, 'Contrary to what one might have assumed, a higher market share did not always correlate with a higher reprint rate' ('The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 26).

from 1583 to 1642 and the number of plays among them that were reprinted within 25 years. He divides the 60-year period into slices of 20 years, allowing us to compare his figures for 1583–1602 and 1603–1622 to ours.[35] As Table 4 shows, over the 40-year period, the reprint rate increases for printed plays and poems alike, but, significantly, the rate is much lower for poems than for plays, 27.1 per cent as opposed to 49.3 per cent. What that means is that only a little more than one poem (or collection of poems) in four was reprinted within a quarter century of original publication.

Farmer and Lesser focus on a slightly different time window, 1576–1625, and use a somewhat different methodology when examining reprint rates: whereas Blayney focuses on play *texts*, Farmer and Lesser are interested in play*books*.[36] Consequently, when a new edition of a play first published separately appears in a collection, it is counted as a reprint by Blayney, but not by Farmer and Lesser, given that the new edition is part of a commercially very different playbook. For printed poetry, the same distinction is important. For instance, many poems by John Taylor, the 'Water Poet', first appeared separately in quarto or octavo before being integrated into the folio collection of *All the Workes of John Taylor the Water Poet* in 1630. If we apply Blayney's parameters to printed poetry, Taylor's earlier, separately published poems receive a reprint in the 1630 Folio, but if we apply Farmer and Lesser's, they do not. According to our figures, almost 50 printed (collections of) poems which first appeared between 1583 and 1622 were reprinted within 25 years but were so within substantially different poetry *books*. We apply Blayney's methodology in our count of printed (collections of) poems in Table 4 (and thus include these reprints), and Farmer and Lesser's in our count for Table 5 (and thus exclude them, which reduces the number of poetry books reprinted within 25 years to 142). This is what chiefly accounts for the higher reprint rate of printed (collections of) poetry in Table 4 above (27.1 per cent) than in Table 5 below (19.7 per cent).

To examine the 'relative' popularity of playbooks, Farmer and Lesser compare the reprint rates for first editions of playbooks to those of sermon books and speculative books (i.e., books published for sale in bookshops) over periods of 5, 10, and 20 years respectively.[37] What emerges if we compare their figures to ours (Table 5) is that poetry books had roughly the same prospect of being reprinted as

35 See Blayney, 'The Publication of Playbooks', 387. For Farmer and Lesser's slightly different figures for the same period, see 'The Publication of Playbooks Revisited', 31.

36 Another methodological difference between Blayney and Farmer and Lesser is that Blayney considers the year of publication as the first of the 25 years in which a play was or was not reprinted, whereas Farmer and Lesser start counting with the year after that of publication (see Farmer and Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 31).

37 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 18–24. Note that Farmer and Lesser's sample of speculative books excludes playbooks (see 20). In 'What Is Print Popularity?', Farmer and Lesser write that 'Of all speculative first editions printed in the Elizabethan period (1559–1602), 22.3 per cent were reprinted within 20 years. It was thus the norm in the retail book trade for about one in five titles to reach a second edition within 20 years' (forthcoming).

Table 3. Market share of English poetry books and playbooks compared, 1583–1622

	1583–1592	1593–1602	1603–1612	1613–1622	Total, 1583–1622
First edition, poetry books	86	205	195	215	701
First edition, playbooks	18	75	87	32	212
Total, poetry books	125	284	277	335	1021
Total, playbooks	24	106	136	87	353
Market share, poetry books	5.15%	11.22%	8.14%	8.22%	8.21%
Market share, playbooks	0.99%	4.18%	3.99%	2.13%	2.84%

Table 4. Reprint rates of poetry books and playbooks, 1583–1622

	1583–1602	1603–1622	1583–1622
Professional plays, first editions	96	115	211
Professional plays reprinted inside 25 years	46	58	104
(Collections of) poem(s), first editions	291	410	701
(Collections of) poem(s) reprinted inside 25 years	72	118	190
Fraction of professional plays reprinted inside 25 years	47.9%	50.4%	49.3%
Fraction of (collections of) poem(s) reprinted inside 25 years	24.7%	28.8%	27.1%

Table 5. Reprint rates of poetry books, playbooks, sermon books and speculative books in general

	Reprint inside 5 years (%)	Reprint inside 10 years (%)	Reprint inside 20 years (%)
Professional Plays, 1576–1625	20.2	29.8	39.9
Sample of speculative books	12.4	15.3	18.1
Sermons in English, 1576–1625	16.9	18.0	19.3
Poetry books, 1583–1622	13.1	16.4	19.7

sermon books and speculative books more generally but were far less likely to reach a second edition than playbooks. For just under one poetry book in five was there sufficient demand for a reprint within 20 years of original publication, a fact we will need to remember when we return to the question of the popularity of Shakespeare's printed poems below.

We have acknowledged above that our 'poetry book' category is capacious and ranges from slim pamphlets of occasional verse to major works in folio, so the question arises whether the average poetry book can be compared to a playbook or a sermon book. The price of books depended on their number of sheets;[38] short books were cheap to produce and, since they were inexpensive, yielded small profits or resulted in small losses if they failed to sell. With long books, in contrast, publishers took greater risks and, if the books sold, reaped greater benefits. Knowledge of the scope of books thus provides important information about their risk–profit relationship. We have been able to examine the sheet length of 687 of the 701 poetry books published between 1583 and 1622, and the average number of sheets per poetry book comes out at approximately 8.3. This number is skewed by some unusually long books: Edward Fairfax's translation of Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1600), Sir John Harington's translation of *Orlando Furioso* (1591, 1607), Thomas Heywood's *Troia Britanica* (1609), and Sir Arthur Gorges's translation of *Lucans Pharsalia* (1614) all amount to more than one hundred sheets (i.e., more than four hundred folio pages). At the other end of the spectrum, we have a significant number of slight pamphlets: about 200 titles are books of three-and-a-half sheets or less, and the median length of our poetry books is no more than five sheets. The typical poetry book has somewhere between three and eight sheets (approximately 380 of the 687 books are in that range). The median length of poetry books is thus clearly inferior to that of professional playbooks (9.5 sheets), but not much inferior to that of sermon books (6.5 sheets).[39]

It thus turns out that in several respects—market share, reprint rates, and median length—poetry books functioned in the book trade more like sermon books than like playbooks. At the turn of the century, their market share amounted to about 11 per cent of books published for sale in bookshops, a remarkable fraction given the broad range of subjects covered by the book trade, from religion, law, medicine, education, science, geography and history to information and news, not to mention the other main genres of literature, drama and prose fiction. Yet the interest in most of these poetry books was not great enough for them to reach a second edition.[40] Perhaps what made investment in a poetry book desirable for a publisher, then, was not the prospect that it would become a bestseller, which was

38 On 19 January 1598, the Stationers' Company passed an ordinance according to which 'all books being new copies which hereafter shall be printed, without pictures, in the pica (the Roman, the Italica), and the English letter (and the Roman and Italica to the same), and the brevier and long primer letters shall not be sold above these rates following, viz.: Those of the pica (Roman, Italica), the English (and the Roman and Italica to the same), to be sold not above a penny for two sheets' (quoted in Francis R. Johnson, 'Notes on English Retail Book-Prices, 1550–1640', *The Library* 5th ser., 5 (1950), 84).

39 See Farmer and Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 24. The number of pages per sheet is four in a folio, 8 in a quarto and 16 in an octavo.

40 For considerations of press runs, see Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford, 1972), 162, and Peter W. M. Blayney, *The Texts of King Lear and Their Origins: Volume I, Nicholas Okes and the First Quarto* (Cambridge, 1982), 33–9.

unlikely, but the popularity of the genre as a whole (as suggested by its market share) and the steady supply of new material for which a sufficient—if not great—number of customers could be found.

That a playbook would reach a second edition was about twice as likely as a poetry book, even though considerably fewer playbooks were published than poetry books, an apparent paradox which Farmer and Lesser have attempted to explain in terms of supply.[41] Given the high number of early modern plays we know once existed but failed to reach print (there are more than 550 of them,[42] and many more must have existed of which no trace has survived), we find it hard to believe that there was a time when the theatre industry produced fewer play texts than stationers would have liked to publish.[43] Although there were fewer plays being written than sermons, there must always have been more plays reaching the playhouses than impacted on the book trade.

However, many plays disappeared from the theatres after a short run of performances, giving a publisher no reason to invest: lack of popularity in one medium (the stage) did not promise popularity in another (the printed page).[44] Conversely, if a play was so popular in the theatre that it promised to remain in the company's repertory, a publisher had good reasons to invest. What appears to have been in short supply, then, was the right kind of plays, those which were successful enough in the theatre to return to the stage in revivals. For publishers, these had an advantage other books did not have, namely free publicity offered by performances in the theatre and the playbills advertising them. This may explain why the reprint rate of poetry books is roughly the same as that of sermons and speculative books in general but clearly inferior to that of printed plays: whereas plays could profit from their continued visibility and popularity in another medium, poems, like sermons and other printed texts, could not.[45]

Shakespeare's and Contemporary Poetry Books

The preceding examination of the popularity of poetry books in the book trade now allows us to contextualize more fully the dissemination of Shakespeare's poems in print. We have seen that far more poetry books than playbooks were published, but that they were less likely to be reprinted. It is striking how badly

41 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 25–6.

42 See Roslyn L. Knutson and David McInnis, 'The *Lost Plays Database*: A Wiki for Lost Plays', *MRDE*, 24 (2011), 47.

43 See Thomas Heywood's claim in *The English Traveller* (London, 1633) to have had 'either an entire hand, or at the least a maine finger' in the writing of 220 plays (sig. A3r).

44 The plays whose failure in the theatre precisely became a selling point in print form an exception that confirms the rule (see Zachary Lesser, 'Walter Burre's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*', *ELR*, 29 (1999), 22–43). For the repertories of early modern theatre companies, see Roslyn L. Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company, 1594–1613* (Fayetteville, 1991).

45 See also Farmer and Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', 26 (footnote 64).

these patterns correspond to the case of Shakespeare, who had only four poetry books published up to 1622 as opposed to 20 playbooks, yet three of those poetry books were reprinted and went through not just two but three or more editions. His poetry books thus account for less than one per cent of the 701 first editions of poetry books published between 1583 and 1622. If we include reprints, his total is 22 editions by 1622, which corresponds to 2.15 per cent of the 1021 poetry books published. Even if we focus on the 10-year period from 1593 to 1602, when the popularity of Shakespeare's poetry was at its peak, he accounts for no more than 13 of the 284 poetry books published, meaning less than one book in twenty. In contrast, Shakespeare's playbooks constituted 'more than a sixth of the playbook editions published between 1594 to 1616 and more than a quarter of those published between 1594 and 1602'.[46] As a dramatist, Shakespeare easily out-published all his contemporaries, yet quite a number of his contemporaries had far more poetry books published between 1583 and 1622 than Shakespeare, not only a well-known poet like Michael Drayton, but also George Wither (with 30 poetry books), Nicholas Breton (40), John Taylor (42), and Samuel Rowlands (51). In terms of the fraction his books represented of the total output of their genre, Shakespeare's poetry books, contrary to his playbooks, never came close to dominating the market.

If we look at the popularity of Shakespeare's poetry books as reflected by the number of their reprints, a very different picture emerges. Of the 701 poetry books first published between 1583 to 1622, 142 were reprinted within a quarter century of publication,[47] receiving a total of 307 reprints during this period. The average number of reprints within 25 years of publication of the 701 poetry books is thus 0.44. As for Shakespeare, he had four poetry books published, and the number of reprints they received within 25 years is 10 (*Venus and Adonis*), 5 (*The Rape of Lucrece*), 2 (*The Passionate Pilgrime*), and 0 (*The Sonnets*), so a total of 17 and an average of 4.25. In terms of their reprint rate, Shakespeare's poetry books were thus vastly more successful than poetry books in general.

It is therefore useful to consider the other poetry books that went through a similar number of editions before 1640.[48] Robert Southwell's *Saint Peters Complaint* (1595) received 12 reprints, and another two editions (which we do not count) were printed at St Omer by the English College Press. Although it uses the same verse form as *Venus and Adonis*, *Saint Peters Complaint*, in stark contrast to the eroticism of Shakespeare's poem, is a devotional work about the final days of Christ. Southwell's work is known to have been widely admired by other poets of the period such as Ben Jonson,[49] and the popularity of this particular book was

46 Erne, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade*, 46

47 As pointed out above (see 11), this number excludes poems which were reprinted in substantially different poetry books.

48 We consider reprints up to 1640, or up to 1642 if the first edition appeared in either 1621 or 1622, to allow for an interval of 20 years.

49 See Robert S. Miola, 'Catholic Writings', in Michael Hattaway (ed.), *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 2010), 449–63, 459.

boosted by Southwell's widely reported execution for treason in 1595.[50] Following this with nine reprints is Christopher Marlowe's epyllion *Hero and Leander* (1598), whose popularity may similarly have been increased by the author's posthumous reputation.[51]

Several top-sellers are satirical works. George Wither's *Withers Motto* (1621) and *Abuses Stript, and Whipt* (1613) were both reprinted seven times in rapid succession, suggesting an intense and short-lived popularity, distinct from the longevity of works by Southwell, Marlowe, or Shakespeare. Samuel Rowlands's satires, *The Letting of Humors Blood in the Head-vaine* (1600), *Democritus, or Doctor Merry-man his Medicines, against Melancholy Humors* (1607) and *Diogines Lanthorne* (1607), also received seven reprints each but over a longer period.[52] The final work to match this number of reprints is Michael Drayton's *Poems* (1605), making it the most popular book of collected poetry first published between 1583 and 1622.[53]

Only one poetry book was reprinted six times: John Taylor's devotional *Booke of Martyrs* (1616), of which the first six editions appeared in sexagesimo-quarto. With five reprints each follow William Warner's verse history *Albions England* (1586), John Davies's philosophical poem *Nosce Teipsum* (1599), Joshua Sylvester's *Bartas: his Devine Weekes and Workes* (1605), John Harington's translation, *The Englishmans Docter* (1607) and Robert Speed's mock-heroic satire *The Counter-scuffle* (1621). We count seven books of poetry with four reprints, twenty-four with three, twenty-six which were reprinted twice, and seventy-two books which only reached a second edition.[54] According to our count, 556 of the 701 books of poetry published between 1583 and 1622 were not reprinted.

50 See Lily B. Campbell, *Divine Poetry and Drama in Sixteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2011), 116–8. On the influence and popularity of Southwell, see also Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558–1660* (Cambridge, 1999), and St Robert Southwell, *Collected Poems*, ed. Peter Davidson and Anne Sweeney (Manchester, 2007).

51 See Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (Toronto, 1997), 238–9.

52 This is perhaps particularly surprising in the case of *The Letting of Humors Blood in the Head-vaine* seeing as the Stationers' Court ordered that Rowlands's book, containing 'matters unfytt to be published', should be 'publiquely burnt', an opinion evidently not shared by Rowlands's enthusiastic readers. See W. W. Greg and Eleanore Boswell (eds), *Records of the Court of the Stationers' Company: 1576 to 1602 from Register B* (London, 1930), 79 and lviii, n. 1.

53 The collected works of the Scottish poet David Lindsay were also extremely popular. First published in Edinburgh in 1568, they were reprinted 13 times between 1574 and 1634. Popular miscellanies that reached print before 1583 include *The Paradyse of Daynty Devises* (1576), which was reprinted seven times between 1578 and 1606, and *Songes and Sonnettes*, the book that became known as *Tottel's Miscellany*, which was reprinted nine times between 1557 and 1587.

54 Thomas Tusser's instructional poem *A Hundreth Good Pointes of Husbandrie* (1557) received a massive 22 reprints between 1562 and 1638 (10 of which appeared between 1583 and 1622). Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) is also worthy of mention, receiving six reprints by 1617 and an additional reprint in 1653, when it was printed alongside a translation of the work into Latin.

Comparatively speaking, therefore, Shakespeare's poetry books were extremely popular. With 15 reprints before 1640, *Venus and Adonis* appears to have had unrivalled success among poetry books. With seven reprints, the popularity of *Lucrece* is matched only by a handful of publications, and exceeds that of 98.6 per cent of the other poetry books published at the time. Scholars have often commented on the early popularity of Shakespeare's narrative poems, but we are not sure that their astounding level of success compared to the book-trade performance of other poetry books of their period has been noted, putting *Venus and Adonis* in first place and *The Rape of Lucrece* in shared fourth place of the 701 poetry books first published from 1583 to 1622. In addition, with two reprints, a feat matched by only 10.4 per cent of other poetry books, even *The Passionate Pilgrime* can be considered popular.[55] As for Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, their failure to reach a second edition was shared by more than 79 per cent of the poetry books published in the period.

In order to contextualize the success of *Venus and Adonis* and the lack of success of the *Sonnets*, it is necessary to provide an account of the popularity of generically related works from the same period. *Venus and Adonis* is now often described as an epyllion,[56] a prominent genre during the 1590s, which achieved notoriety for its fascination with youthful eroticism, luxury, and transgression. Georgia Brown has noted its 'extremely self-conscious' nature, describing it as a site where 'writers ostentatiously raid each other, copy each other and continue each other's work'.[57] One context of Shakespeare's success is thus a particular hotbed of literary activity.

As Brown notes, the fashion for writing miniature epic was 'born in and for the Inns of Court', and was closely tied to the writing of complaint and satire.[58] From the late 1580s, epyllia kept appearing well into the reign of James I, ceaselessly adapted by new imitators, their frequent engagement with metamorphosis being well suited to figuring cultural, social, and political change. The publication of Thomas Lodge's *Scillaes Metamorphosis* (1589) is usually credited with inducing the vogue;[59] however, as Table 6 shows,[60] it was not until the appearance of

55 As Colin Burrow has observed, *The Passionate Pilgrime* 'was clearly designed to exploit the excitement which surrounded the name of Shakespeare' (*Complete Sonnets and Poems*, 74). For a discussion of William Jaggard's marketing strategy and Thomas Heywood's reaction to it, see Burrow, 77–9.

56 For a useful definition of this subgenre, see Siobhan Keenan, *Renaissance Literature* (Edinburgh, 2008), 158–9. Like other generic labels used today—such as 'narrative poem' or 'minor epic'—the term 'epyllion' was not in use in Shakespeare's time (see *Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Burrow, 15–6).

57 Georgia Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature* (Cambridge, 2004), 103.

58 See Brown, *Redefining Elizabethan Literature*, 105. As James Richard Ellis observes in *Sexuality and Citizenship: Metamorphosis in Elizabethan Erotic Verse* (Toronto, 2003), Shakespeare and Marlowe, though the most successful writers of epyllia, are also the least typical, given that neither attended the Inns of Court (see 18).

59 See, for instance, Götz Schmitz, *The Fall of Women in Early English Narrative Verse* (Cambridge, 1990), 46.

60 In Tables 6 and 7, we use italics in the right-hand column for collections in which the epyllion or sonnet sequence was included. The number between brackets indicates the

Table 6. Epyllia first published between 1583 and 1622

Author	Title	Dates of editions
Matthew Grove	*Pelops and Hippodamia*	1587 (8)
Thomas Lodge	*Scillaes Metamorphosis*	1589 (4)
William Shakespeare	*Venus and Adonis*	1593 (4), 1594, 1595 (8), 1596, 1599, 1599, 1602?, 1602 [07?], 1602 [08?], 1602 [10?], 1617, 1620, 1627, 1630, [1630–36?], 1636 (16)
Thomas Heywood	*Oenone and Paris*	1594 (4)
R. B.	*Orpheus his Journey to Hell*	1595 (4)
J. C. or I. C.	*Alcilia Philoparthens Loving Follie*	1595 (4), 1613, 1619 (8), 1628 (4)
George Chapman	*Ovids Banquet of Sence*	1595 (4), 1639
Michael Drayton	*Endimion and Phoebe. Ideas Latmus*	1595? (4), *1606? (8), [1619] (2)*
Thomas Edwards	*Cephalus and Procris. Narcissus*	1595 (4)
Richard Lynche	*Dom Diego and Ginevra* (with *Diella*)	1596 (8)
Gervase Markham	*The Poem of Poems*	1596 (8)
Francis Sabie	*David and Bathsheba* (in *Adams Complaint*)	1596 (4)
Anonymous	*Loves Complaints* (*Orpheus and Euridice*)	1597 (4)
Christopher Marlowe (with George Chapman)	*Hero and Leander*	1598 (4), 1598, 1600, 1606, 1609, 1613, 1617, 1622, 1629, 1637
Henry Petowe	*The Second part of Hero and Leander*	1598 (4)
John Marston	*The Metamorphosis of Pigmalions Image*	1598 (8), *1613 (4), 1619 (8), 1628 (4)*
Anonymous, trans. R. S.	*Phillis and Flora*	*1595 (4)*, 1598, *1639*
Henry Petowe	*Philochasander and Elanira*	1599 (4)
Robert Roche	*Eustathia, or the Constancie of Susanna*	1599 (8)
John Weever	*Faunus and Melliflora*	1600 (4)
John Beaumont	*The Metamorphosis of Tabacco*	1602 (8)
Ovid, trans. Francis Beaumont	*Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*	1602 (4), *1640*
William Barksted	*Mirrha the Mother of Adonis*	1607 (8)
Richard Niccols	*The Cuckow*	1607 (4)
William Barksted	*Hiren: or The Faire Greeke*	1611 (8)
Henry Austin	*The Scourge of Venus*	1613 (8), 1614, 1620
Richard Brathwait	*Pyramus and Thysbe* (in *A Strappado for the Divell*)	1614 (8)
Musaeus, trans. George Chapman	*The Divine Poem of Musæus*	1616 (32)
Dunstan Gale	*Pyramus and Thisbe*	*1596?*, 1617 (4), 1626

Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* (1598) that instances of the genre were successful in the book trade.[61] Indeed, apart from Marlowe's and Shakespeare's, very few epyllia received a second edition, a result that may seem surprising in light of Clark Hulse's assertion that 'except for Sidney, every major Elizabethan poet, and most of the minor ones wrote minor epics'.[62] The only other notable exceptions concern the reprinting of J. C.'s *Alcilia* in 1613, 18 years after its original publication in 1595, together with Marston's *Pigmalions Image* (1598), which had been singled out by the Bishops Ban of 1599.[63] As William Keach notes, Marston's 'raw verbal lewdness' must have been hard for the authorities to overlook, a further reminder that notoriety often worked as good publicity.[64] The reprinting of *Alcilia* coincides with a new edition of Henry Austin's *The Scourge of Venus* (1613), a translation of Ovid and an apparent 'continuation' of Shakespeare's poem.

The exceptional popularity of *Venus and Adonis* is suggested not only by its many editions, but also by the spread of its verse form: the six-line stanza known as a 'heroic sestet'. Its appearance in anthologies of poetry such as Thomas Howell's *H. His Devises, for his Owne Exercise* (1581) and its use in the complaint genre (as in Anthony Munday's *Mirrour for Magistrates* (1579)) and elegy (as in two elegies written for Sir Christopher Hatton by Richard Johnson and John Phillips in 1591), indicate its popularity with authors before Shakespeare.[65] However, following the publication of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* in 1593, its verse form became considerably more widespread, suggesting a new surge in popularity with authors, who perhaps wished to imitate Shakespeare's success. Of the epyllia in our list, 13 original poems have the same verse form as *Venus and Adonis*. Of the remaining works, 11 are written in rhyming couplets (like Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*) and 5 are stanzaic in form, among them *David and Bathsheba*, which is in rhyme royal (like Shakespeare's *Lucrece*). In addition, at least 10 complaints published between 1593 and 1601 use the form. After 1600, the most notable use of the *Venus and Adonis* stanza is made in elegies and epitaphs, attaining peak levels of popularity in 1603 and 1612–1613 following the death of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Henry. Samuel Rowlands used the *Venus and Adonis* form throughout his career as a satirist, including in *The Letting of Humors Blood in the Head-vaine* (1600),

format, '2' for folio, '4' for quarto, and so on. When no information is provided, the format is the same as that of the preceding edition. For conjectural dates, between square brackets, we follow the *STC*.

61 Although Marlowe's epyllion did not appear in print until 1598 it must have been written at around the same time as *Venus and Adonis*; Marlowe was killed in May 1593, and the poem first appeared in the Stationers' Register in September of the same year.

62 Clark Hulse, *Metamorphic Verse: The Elizabethan Minor Epic* (Princeton, 1981), 3.

63 For the full text of the ban, see William R. Jones, 'The Bishops' Ban of 1599 and the Ideology of English Satire', *Literature Compass* 7 (2010), 332–46, 332.

64 William Keach, *Elizabethan Erotic Narratives: Irony and Pathos in the Ovidian Poetry of Shakespeare, Marlowe and Their Contemporaries* (Hassocks, 1977), 131.

65 See also Peter Hyland, *An Introduction to Shakespeare's Poems* (Basingstoke, 2003), 67–8.

which was reprinted seven times, and in *Tis Merrie When Gossips Meete* (1602) and *The Famous Historie of Guy Earle of Warwick* (1609), which were reprinted four times. Shakespeare thus cannot be credited with introducing the heroic sestet to the market, but his use of it in a regularly reprinted narrative poem coincides with the form's revitalization in a wide range of genres, from Southwell's divine complaint to Robert Armin's jest book *Quips upon Questions* (1600).

Unlike Shakespeare's narrative poems, his *Sonnets* received little commercial success and were not reprinted until John Benson included them in his 1640 edition of Shakespeare's 'Poems', which refashioned them for 'a market attuned to Cavalier lyric'.[66] Critical explanations for their apparent lack of popularity range from hypothetical objections to the problematic nature of their content, which has been described as 'part-homoerotic, part cynically heterosexual [. . .] and virtually never spiritual', to an overwhelming sense of what Joel Fineman has called the 'literary belatedness' that their author himself appears to create.[67]

Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, as is well known, set the trend for sonnet collections, with at least 20 more following in the 1590s and another 14 up to 1618.[68] With three editions from 1591 to 1597 (of which the first was famously pirated by Thomas Newman), *Astrophil and Stella* was a commercial success, and so were its immediate successors: both Henry Constable's *Diana*, with three editions from 1592 to 1595, and Samuel Daniel's *Delia*, the bestseller among the sonnet collections of the period with five editions from 1592 to 1598, appeared during the peak of the sonnet writing vogue.[69] The commercial success of the earliest sonnet collections may partly explain why so many others followed in the years following them: as they were reaching second and third editions, publishers must have been keen to publish—and may even have solicited—others. Yet none of the later sonnet sequences were as successful as the earliest three. If we discount reprints in larger collections, only 2 of the 30 sonnet collections published between 1593 and 1615 received a second edition and none a third. Not until John Taylor's *A Briefe Remembrance of all the English Monarchs* of 1618, which was accompanied by a lavish series of woodcuts, was another sonnet collection published that would go through more than two editions. Instead, it seems to have become fashionable to

66 *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Burrow, 94.

67 *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (London, 1997), 70. Joel Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye* (University of California Press, 1986), 298.

68 A forerunner of the genre, Thomas Watson's *Hekatompathia* (1582) consists of one hundred eighteen-line 'sonnets', composed of three heroic sestets each. The layout is comparable to that of *Alcilia*, except that in *Alcilia* the stanzas are clearly spaced and individually numbered.

69 The sonnet sequence that Shakespeare's *Sonnets* most resembles is the defective edition of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, rather than the later, authorized reprints. See *Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Burrow, 97–8, and Arthur F. Marotti, 'Shakespeare's Sonnets as Literary Property', in Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (eds), *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry* (Chicago, 1990), 143–73.

reprint sonnet sequences within collected works (like Drayton's *Ideas Mirror* in his *Works*, Spenser's *Amoretti* in folio reprints of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, and William Drummond's in a volume of his verse), which Shakespeare's was not (or not until 1640).[70] By having a sonnet collection published in 1609 which did not receive a single individual reprint, Shakespeare was thus in good company: almost all other individual sonnet collections published in the years before and after did no better in the book trade.[71]

In 1608, the stationer Robert Raworth, who had taken up his freedom on 31 March 1606, surreptitiously forged an edition of *Venus and Adonis*. The rights to Shakespeare's poem were owned not by Raworth but by William Leake, who commissioned Raworth to print two sermons by Henry Smith. For the title page, Leake lent Raworth the winged-skull device,[72] which Leake had also employed in 1602 for an edition of *Venus and Adonis*. Raworth seized the opportunity, used Leake's device to create a *Venus and Adonis* title page misdated '1602', and printed a whole edition which followed the one of 1602 as closely as possible. Unfortunately for Raworth, his forgery came to light, and, as a consequence, he was 'suppresst' by the Stationers' Company 'for printing anothers Copy'.[73] His press was seized, and he printed no more books for the next 25 years.[74]

By printing *Venus and Adonis*, Raworth took an extraordinary risk, and the present article may help us understand why he did so: Shakespeare's poem was not simply a popular poem, but it was the best-selling poetry book of its time, going through more editions than any of the other 701 poetry books first published between 1583 and 1622. We have suggested that this is all the more remarkable as, apart from *Venus and Adonis* and Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, very few epyllia were ever reprinted. *The Rape of Lucrece*, although less successful in the book trade than *Venus and Adonis*, was in fact another top-seller among the poetry books of the time, and even *The Passionate Pilgrime* went through more editions than almost ninety per cent of contemporary poetry books. As for Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, their failure to reach a reprint, which has often surprised scholars, may become more easily understandable if we realize that only about one poetry book in five reached a second edition within 25 years of publication, and that sonnet collections in particular were unlikely to receive a reprint: as we have shown, of the 30 sonnet collections published between 1593 and 1615, only 2 did so.

70 See Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford, 2011), 48, and Michael R. G. Spiller's *The Development of the Sonnet* (London, 1992), 183–8.

71 Other sonnet sequences did not reach print until much later, including Henry Constable's *Spiritual Sonnets*, Sir John Davies's *Gulling Sonnets*, and Fulke Greville's *Caelica*.

72 See R. B. McKerrow, *Printers' and Publishers' Devices in England and Scotland, 1485–1640* (London, 1913), device 341.

73 Edward Arber (ed.), *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers 1554–1640 AD*, 5 vols (London, 1875–1894), 3.703.

74 For the Raworth forgery, see Erne, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade*, 151–4.

Table 7. Sonnet sequences first published between 1583 and 1622

Author	Title	Dates of editions
Philip Sidney	*Syr P.S. His Astrophel and Stella*	1591 (4), 1591, 1597?
Henry Constable	*Diana*	1592 (4), 1594? (8) 1595?
Samuel Daniel	*Delia*	1592 (4), 1592, 1594 (16), 1595 (8), 1598 (12), *1601 (2)*, *1611 (12) 1623 (4)*
Barnabe Barnes	*Parthenophil and Parthenophe*	1593 (4)
Giles Fletcher the Elder	*Licia*	1593 (4)
Thomas Lodge	*Phillis*	1593 (4)
Henry Lok	*Sundry Christian Passions*	1593 (16)
Thomas Watson	*The Tears of Fancie*	1593 (4)
Michael Drayton	*Ideas Mirrour*	1594 (4), *1599 (8), 1600, 1602, 1605 (8), 1608, 1610, 1613, [1616?], [1619] (2), [1630] (8), [1637] (12)*
William Percy	*Sonnets to the fairest Coelia*	1594 (4)
Anonymous	*Zepheria*	1594 (4)
Barnabe Barnes	*A Divine Centurie of Spirituall Sonnets*	1595 (4)
Richard Barnfield	*Cynthia*	1595 (4), 1595
E. C.	*Emaricdulfe*	1595 (8)
Edmund Spenser	*Amoretti and Epithalamion*	1595 (8), *1611 (2), 1617*
Bartholomew Griffin	*Fidessa*	1596 (8)
Richard Lynche	*Diella*	1596 (8)
William Smith	*Chloris*	1596 (4)
Henry Lok	*Ecclesiastes*	1597 (4)
Robert Tofte	*Laura*	1597 (8)
Thomas Rogers	*Celestiall Elegies of the Goddesses and the Muses*	1598 (8)
Jean du Nesme	*The Miracle of the Peace in Fraunce*	1599 (8)
Thomas Newton	*Atropoïon Delion*	1603 (4)
Henry Petowe	*Elizabetha Quasi Vivens*	1603 (4), 1603
Henry Petowe	*Englands Cæsar*	1603 (4)
William Alexander	*Aurora*	1604 (4)
Richard Nugent	*Rich: Nugents Cynthia*	1604 (4)
John Davies of Hereford	*Wittes Pilgrimage*	[1605?] (4)
John Davies of Hereford	*The Holy Roode*	1609 (4)
William Shakespeare	*Shake-speares Sonnets*	1609 (4), *1640 (8)*
David Murray	*Caelia* (in *The Tragicall Death of Sophonisba*)	1611 (8)
Anonymous	*Great Brittans Mourning Garment*	1612 (4)
George Wither	*Prince Henries obsequies or Mournefull Elegies*	1612 (4)
John Taylor	*The Muses Mourning*	1615 (8), *1630 (2)*
John Taylor	*A Briefe Remembrance of all the English Monarchs*	1618 (8), 1618, 1621, 1622, *1630 (2)*

Apart from shedding light on the early success or lack of success of Shakespeare's poems in print, the present article has also examined the popularity of poetry books more generally. Poetry books accounted for a considerable fraction of the commercial publications in the trade of printed books, with an average of about eight per cent in the period from 1583 to 1622 and peaking at approximately eleven per cent at the turn of the seventeenth century, the market share of poetry books thus being almost three times that of professional plays. The number of editions of poetry books rose from fewer than 10 per year in the mid-1580s to an average of more than 30 per year between 1613 and 1622. In his own lifetime, Shakespeare thus witnessed and contributed to the establishment of a significant market for poetry books in print.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1 identifies by *STC* number all the poetry books included in our calculations. Numbers in italics identify reprints.

Table A1. Printed books of poetry, including reprints, 1583–1622

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Yearly total
1583	800	4800.3	5431	6199	6433	*18277.5*	*24807*	25344			8
1584	14373	*14522.7*	16634	*18943*	*18958*	*21105*	21671	22928	24802		9
1585	*1990*	*3655.5*	6180	*7520*	*13867*	16756	18777	20404	*24381*	25342	10
1586	5228	6409	7605	16617	18325.7	18425	*23091*	*24382*	25079		9
1587	*1356.9*	2769	5261	*11638*	12343	12403	*13288*	*13445*	*13868*	14925	
	15096	*18959*	19871	22162	24060	24330	25118.4	25349			18
1588	847	4668	5257	7582	12556	*12556.3*	13972.5	*15097*	18260	*19152*	
	19903a.5	23937	*25118.5*								13
1589	1041.7	7159	15106	16674	17461	*17461.5*	17462	17464	*17465*	19534	
	19537	21080	21121.5	*24817*	*25080*	*25118.6*					16
1590	*5633.3*	6363	*7520.5*	11287.5	*13692*	19546	21669	23080	*24383*	24590	
	25121										11
1591	746	3633	5253	5814	7199	11338.5	11340	12271	14379	14685.5	
	19876	21057	22533a.5	22536	*22537*	23078	23079	*23092*			18
1592	3683	5231	5237	5637	6243.2	*6243.3*	11341	14685.7	*15663*	*21255*	
	21672	*25081*	26062								13
1593	1469	5220	5248	5262	7202	11055	13165	16662	16697	*18960*	
	19539	21516	*22137*	22354	*24384*	25122					16
1594	1480	1487	*2770*	4990	5242	*5638*	*6243.4*	7203	7205	7214	
	12578.5	12751	*13150*	13595	15216	15679	18755	19078.4	19618	19863.7	
	22345	*22355*	*22991.5*	23579	23697	25118	25755	26124			28
1595	1060	1467	1483	*1484*	4268	4274.5	4985	4999	5245	*5638.3*	
	6243.5	6244	6324	7192	*7214.5*	7525	12096	*13973*	16658	17385	
	21088	*21105.5*	21535	21536	21537	21658	21662	*22356*	22955	*22955.5*	
	22955.7	*22956*	*22957*	23076	23077	24296					36
1596	4105	5238	5249	5254	5332	5582	5737	5865	5869	6360	
	6820	7207	7232	7503	*7521*	10943	*10944*	*12096.5*	12367	14029	
	17091	17386	17867	21296	21534	*22357*	22872	*23082*	23086	23088	
	24803	*25082*	*25118.8*								33
1597	749	3631	*3634*	7193	12716	*15664*	*15664.3*	16696	16857	17906	
	18049	*18049.5*	19338	19793	19797	21499	*22538*	*22958*	*23093*	24097	
	24385										21
1598	1485	1559	3216	3696	3921	4614	*5077*	5259.5	5260	*6243.6*	
	7194	12504	*12717*	12718.5	13174	*13289*	13632	13635	14830.3	17413	
	17414	17482	17485	19807	19880	20166.5	20700	21225	21348	21365	
	21661	21670	*22346*	24096							34
1599	3682.5	*3727*	5234	6151	6261	6350	*6350.5*	6351	6355	*6355.4*	
	7195	7353.5	*12719*	13076	13942	17154	*17486*	17994	19808	19818	
	21137	22341.5	*22342*	*22358*	*22358a*	*22955.3*	*22959*	23294	*24385.5*	*24386*	
	25224										31
1600	378	775.5	3189	3191	3666	3675	*3675.5*	3677	*3677.5*	3678	
	3679	*7196*	7434.7	*7523*	11491	15190	16883.5	17395	*17415*	*17486.5*	
	17868	17885.5	18546	18642	*18944*	18974	19154.3	21307.7	21392.7	*21393*	
	21393.5	*22347*	*22348*	*22960*	23698	24152	*24804*	25225	25642		39
1601	3648	3649	3672	3679.5	3700.5	5119	5329	6236	12504.5	*13150.5*	
	14071	17547	17569	20167	24636.3	24637	25220	25226			18
1602	17.3	1555	1556	1695	3081	3415	3669	3673	*3680*	3699	
	3703	*5080*	6336	*6356*	6373	*7197*	10597.5	*12718*	18583	18972	
	19798	20959	*20959.5*	21409	22107	*22359*	*22960a*	*25083*			28
1603	4282	*5333*	6258	*6260*	6333	7189	7231	7594	7598	10798	
	12311	12678	13592	13626	14357	14379.3	14421	14422	14671	15189	
	15435	15706	17811	17841.7	18248	18252	18513.5	18520	18586	18627	
	18931	*18931a*	*18961*	19528	19803.5	*19804*	19806	20169	20341	21364	

(continued)

Table A1. Continued.

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Yearly total
	21496.5	*21497*	21659	21784	24918	*25221*	25643				47
1604	337	346	584	3682	5222	5672	*5672.5*	5958	7209	7211	
	7211.5	*7212*	*7213*	7215	10432.7	12169	12199	12407	12607	12750	
	12752	13388	14427	*17570*	*17812*	18745	19546	20339	20574	21398	
	21399	21660	21853	22426	23909						35
1605	*1486*	*1808*	*1809*	3659	3660	3701	3996	5460.4	5460.7	6239	
	6344	6457	7216	7606	11497	12200.5	15107.7	*15664.7*	17135	21385	
	21385.5	*21394*	21408	21649	24519	25093	*25756*	25967			28
1606	1598	*5101*	5956	6256	6329	6498	6530	7225.5	*7524*	7558	
	11087	11158	*12407.5*	12568	12582	12940	13868.7	15229.7	*17416*	*17813*	
	19334	20342	20941.7	20960	*20960.5*	21407	25085	*25222*	25264		29
1607	*747*	797	1429	6240	6337	6785	7204	12028	15535	15540	
	16622	18336	18517	20340	20778	21366	21368	*21395*	21605	21665	
	22349	*22360*	24346	24805	25263						25
1608	744	1812.7	*5334*	*6357*	*6374*	*7218*	*13389*	17874	19330	19511.5	
	21368.5	*21368.7*	21386	*21606*	*21650*	*22360a*	25262				17
1609	774	4976	5959	*6245*	6330	6332	11596	13366	*13633*	17359	
	17417	19936	*21367*	21378	21387	21413	*21607*	22353	*22961*	*23083*	
	24148	*25757*									22
1610	*1810*	*1992*	*3190*	5112	5566	*7220*	11058	11526	13018	13246	
	13446	*15665*	*15680*	18307	21005	*21395.5*	*22360b*	22379	*24388*	*25222.5*	20
1611	*745*	1428	3568	5810	*6242*	6341	*6375*	7022	12171	13142	
	13151	*13634*	14534	15227	18296	*18961.7*	19615	*21388*	*21396*	*21651*	
	22107.5	*23077.3*	24649								24
		23093.5									
1612	339	4974	6338	*7023*	7226	10782.5	13158	*14030*	14672	17701	
	19511	19810	20393	21241.5	*21389*	21390	*21390.5*	21526	*21607.3*	*22343*	
	23083.7	23087	23576	*23577*	23760	23769	23791	*25084*	25901	25915	30
1613	384	385	968	1546	1908.5	3704.3	*3704.5*	3831	3914	*4275*	
	6339	6611	*7221*	7257	*7504*	11076	11309	11544	13160	13323	
	13355	14973	15433	*17418*	17703	17847	18347	18525	18587	18981.5	
	19332	19513	*21391*	21392	*21392.3*	*21397*	*21410.5*	*21414*	*21610*	*21652*	
	21686	*23577.5*	23722	23750	23763	23780	24148.3	25174	25891	*25891.5*	
	25892	*25893*	*25894*	26130							54
1614	338	435.31	572.5	*969*	*3192*	3578	3664	3830	3917	4964	
	4975	5452	5581.5	7253	*7258*	11370	13636	14008	14296	*15230*	
	15666	16884	18521	18611	18903.5	*21372.5*	21381	23581	23721	23779	
	23792	23810	*24389*	25409	*25895*	25916					36
1615	587	3588	*3704.7*	4792	5567	10594	10783	12775	*12775.5*	*17841.9*	
	18523	19333	19514	*21369*	*21369.5*	21401	*21401.5*	22638	*22962*	*23084*	
	23582	23741	23752	23775	23804	23806	24043	24593	*25896*	25905	
	25917	*25917.5*	25920	*25921*	*25922*						35
1616	686	*1378*	*1813*	*1909*	3658	*3915*	3915.5	6342	6475.5	*7221.5*	
	7255	10688	10784	18304	18314.5	18522	18524	*19777.5*	19778	*21373*	
	21869	*21870*	21871a.7	*22350*	23582a	23731.3	*23811*	24757	*25918*		29
1617	595.6	708	3664.5	5367	6343	7252	10945	11527	13247	*14523*	
	14893	*15667*	*17419*	*17842*	*19779*	21365.5	*21608*	*22361*	*23077.7*	*23094*	
	23731.5	25180	*25897*	*25906*							24
1618	*595.7*	3568.5	4650	6181.2	11496	*12410*	12776	*13152*	13249	13815	
	15715	18963	19909	*21374*	21405	23736	*23737*	23784	24698		19
1619	3574	*3664.2*	*4276*	*4651*	*6358*	*7222*	12572	12747	12749	*13816*	
	14028	14513	15667.5	17699	18496	18993	19453.7	20443	20566	*21375*	
	21411	22636	23624.7	23767	25265	*25907*					26
1620	*595.8*	*970*	*1379*	*4652*	6030	6497	*6611.5*	6769.5	11253	*13153*	
	14674	*17814*	18975	19080.5	19483	19515	19824	20544	*21256*	*21378.3*	
	21402	21404	*22137.5*	*22362*	*22965*	23575	23583	23751	23770	23788	
	24390	*24805a*	24810	24818	25890	26078.5					36
1621	*186*	2774	3571	3584	3589	3670	*3681*	*3696.7*	5986	*6376*	
	7024	10690	*11545*	13799	13954.3	17525	18963.3	20546	*21653*	*22137.7*	
	23050.5	23057	*23737.5*	23786	23793	23796	23799	23800	*23800.5*	25925	
	25926	*25926.5*	*25927*	*25928*	*25928.5*	*25928.7*					36
1622	1002	1003	1004	*1909.3*	*3697*	*3699.4*	3830.5	4085	*4653*	4988	
	6359	7229	7349.5	10689	10832	12602	12748	13580	13814	14115	
	17120	*17420*	20113	21382	*21871*	*21871a*	23728	*23738*	23742	*23742.5*	
	23762	*23771*	23773	23795	23797	23812	23813	24090	25903	25911	40